

Beginner's Casting Clinic

1. Equipment / Tackle

Rod, reel, line, leader, tippet, fly. - Show and do!

- Setting the rod up, twist or push together. Ensure ferrules are clean, free of dirt or sand and are dry.
- Rods are generally made from graphite these days, but you can still get fibreglass rods and split cane rods are for the guys with the bucks!
- Reel is mounted; either right or left, depends on personal preference. Demo how line feeds off reel.
- Thread the rod. Do this the difficult way or do it the easy way! Difficult way; grab tippet or leader and thread through eyes. Easy way; double up fly line and thread.
- Leader should be 1.5 times the length of the rod. This is minimum length and is a general rule. Shorter than this, the leader will turn over too quickly, and spoil presentation.
- Tie a piece of brightly coloured wool onto tippet. Or a fly, cut off at the bend.
- Talk about the importance of a hat / cap and sunglasses to protect eyes, ears and head from speeding flies.
- Show fly vest, net, fly boxes and all the other goodies.

2. Fly Casting

Show and do!

- Fly casting is a means to an end. But some people get so hooked on the actual casting they forget to fish! The fly line, leader and tippet are designed to deliver the fly to the target, ie the fish, in the most efficient way possible. Unlike bait fishing where a sinker is placed at the end of your fishing line, a fly line carries all the weight and bends the rod like a spring or catapult, a "kettie". This loads the rod. When the rod "unbends" it casts the line for us.

So let's do it.

- Firstly, how do we hold the rod? The most popular way is with the thumb on top of the grip.
- Pull line off the reel with your free hand and let it hang down. Now shake the rod gently side to side and the line will slide down the eyes of the rod and lie on the ground or water if we're practising on water. From a position below your waist, slowly sweep the rod tip behind you and then flick it forwards. What you want to happen is that the fly line should pick up, roll out and flick forwards and land in a straight line. There, you've done your first cast, which is called a roll cast!
- **Okay, now we're ready to start the real business.**
- We will start with the overhead cast. When you think of fly fishing, or see fly fishing movies like "River runs through it" this is the cast you're most likely to see.
- Pull about 9 metres of fly line out the front of the rod. That's about 3 times the rod length. Lay the line out so that it lies straight in front of you. This is important for an overhead cast to work properly.
- Now, trap the fly line between your index finger and the rod handle. Put your free hand in your pocket.

Stance?

- Your foot on your line hand should be slightly forward, pointed toward target. Bend knees slightly, get comfortable.
- Start with rod tip pointing down, elbow relaxed next to your side, and slowly raise your hand lifting the line off the grass or water. As rod nears vertical, speed up, flick the line upwards, squeezing the hand as you do this. Imagine that you are throwing the line upwards, vertically above your head. Pivot the elbow, using the forearm and **not** your wrist.
- The line should smoothly lift off the grass or water and accelerate upwards and backwards. Stop the rod sharply at just past the perpendicular position, and if you want to equate that to a clock face, between 12 and 1 o'clock. Soften your grip on the rod handle.
- The line will continue to travel over the top of the rod and form a loop. The casting loop! You must understand this concept. The loop travels through the air, unrolling all the time until it straightens out behind you.
- Your casting hand should just be outside your elbow and level with your ear.

And now?

Pause!

- The loop of line must travel backwards and fully extend before you start the forward cast. If you try casting forwards while the loop is travelling backwards, the line will crack like a whip. Not good! This could even break off your fly. And, the energy of the line travelling backwards will cancel out the energy of the line travelling forwards with the entire line landing in an ugly heap at your feet. A great cast starts with a great back cast!
- Once the line has straightened out behind you, you can start your forward cast. The way to do this is to rotate the hand forwards and flick the tip. A nice analogy is to imagine you are flicking a bug off the tip of the rod. Or paint off the end of a paint brush.

The Flick!

The line should now travel forwards and over the top of the rod forming a loop. This loop will unroll and the line will straighten in mid-air. Stop the rod hand sharply at about eye-level; some would say the rod tip should stop at 10 o'clock on the clock face. The line will drop gently and you can follow it down with the rod tip.

This is a simple pick-up and lay down cast.

In step form it looks like this:

- **The lift, which moves into**
- **The upward flick**
- **Sharp stop**
- **Pause**
- **Forward flick**
- **Follow the line with the rod tip as drops in front of you.**

You are looking for a tight, aerodynamic loop!

Once we've mastered this we move on to false casting.

- False casting extends the line on each cast eventually reaching the distance required to reach the fish. (Once you're proficient at this you'll want to keep your false casts to the absolute minimum. A fly in the air does not catch fish!).
- Same stance as before. Instead of trapping the line with your index finger, pull some line off the reel and hold a section of this in your line hand. (The hand that's not holding the rod). Your line hand is going to feed the line during false casting.
- Same steps as before, lift, upward flick, sharp stop, pause, forward flick, sharp stop, then release line, backward flick, sharp stop, pause, forward flick, sharp stop, release line, backward flick, sharp stop, pause, forward flick, and then stop sharply, rod at eye-level, allow line to straighten out in front of you, and follow the gently dropping line with the rod tip.
- On each of the pauses wait for the **line** to unfold or straighten; the **rod** to "bounce" in your hand; and load (or bend).
- The trick here is minimum effort. Every time you stop the rod you should feel the rod "bounce" in your hand as the energy of the line unloads and then reloads for the next cast. If you're not feeling this, your grip on the rod may be too tight. Soften your grip as you stop the rod and you'll feel the "bounce". You want to feel the "bounce" every time you stop the rod.

Again, you are looking for tight, aerodynamic loops!

Now, practice, practice, practice!!

Sources:

*South African Fly Fishing Association; Introduction to Coaching - Assistant Coach, Level 1
www.sexyloops.com*